

Ted Braun Edited Interview 4-3-15

Speaker key

JP Jonathan Pitches
EB Edward Braun

JP As you know I've got the job of writing a short introduction to a new edition of Meyerhold on Theatre, and I don't want to mess with any of the material that you so expertly put together, so the introduction is going to sit outside and try and comment on the way in which you've organised things.

So I wanted to go right back, really, and find out, in the first instance, what was the publishing landscape like in 1964 when you were first beginning to stumble across this area and what led you to Methuen ultimately?

00:00:39

EB Well Methuen was the obvious choice. I mean Methuen dominated the field of drama publishing and continued to do so for many years after that. I mean there were other publishers in the field, principally relating to individual dramatists. So, you know, Faber had a small stable, MacMillan in due course launched their series of dramatists. CUP published a certain amount.

Calder more or less cornered the market when it came to Artaud and that kind of theatre, but Methuen was really dominant, and that was due to the influence of two men, quite specifically. The one was John Cullen who was the managing editor. And John had a French wife and spoke fluent French. And had a significant background in French theatre and his Drama editor was Geoffrey Strong.

Geoffrey, like myself, had done the service's Russian course, so he had decent Russian. He also had fluent German, and fluent French, and he became, subsequently, a very distinguished translator from French and German. Russian émigré author, called Andrei Makin (?), Geoffrey translated all his work into English. And, Geoffrey, under John Cullen's guidance, took over the drama list and strengthened it, expanded it very effectively.

00:02:50

JP This is early 60s is it?

EB Early 60s yes. And he remained with them for many years. In due course Nick Hern became a protégé of his, and Nick stayed with them until 1988 when he left and founded Nick Hern Books. And Nick became my editor when I came to do *Director and the Stage*.

JP Oh!

00:03:25

EB So there was this unbroken succession of very powerful, and principled, erudite editors. So Methuen published its series, Methuen's Modern Plays, and also, I mean, very very importantly, Methuen took on Brecht in his entirety. And the collaboration with John Willett, and Ralph Manheim, the translators, and Willett is a scholar, as well, obviously, they, you know, set about publishing everything that Brecht had written, or was written about Brecht.

And I think that's still going on, you know, it was a hugely cumbersome project. But, also, apart from its value in itself, I think it sort of typified the whole conception of drama as a fusion of literature and practice. It certainly influenced me very powerfully and it influenced them. And, of course, for me it provided the obvious model for Brecht on Theatre, because there was... sorry, *Meyerhold on Theatre*. Because Brecht on Theatre was published in 1964, so I took that as the starting point, and at a fairly early stage in my research, 1965/1966, I approached Methuen, and said, look, you've done Brecht on Theatre, which I admire enormously, you know, Meyerhold is a huge lacuna in drama studies, theatre studies, would you consider *Meyerhold on Theatre*?

00:05:33

And I was lucky, because, firstly, as I said, Geoffrey had this Russian facility. John Cullen had actually seen Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* in Paris, in 1930, on tour, so he knew what it was about. And, without signing any formal agreement at that time, they more or less gave the go-ahead and I in due course submitted an outline to them.

And as soon as I came back from research in September 1967, I have still got the contract, I mean I actually signed the contract in October 1967. And the book was published in August the following year. So that's really how it came about.

JP Two questions come out of that for me. One, perhaps you could say a little bit about the Russian services training that you had, and then, secondly, who was it who seeded this interest in Meyerhold in the first place?

EB Good question. The Russian Services course, I don't know how much you know about it, there's a very good book by Harry Shukman, S-H-U-K-M-A-N, called *Secret Classrooms*, which is up there; you can glance up later if you want to. And it ran for, I forget how many years, but quite a number of years, certainly throughout the latter period of National Service.

And graduated something like 5,000 servicemen, emphasis on men, I don't think any women went on the course. But graduated 5,000 servicemen with knowledge of Russian, which ranged from the serviceable, pretty well up to the fluent. And I was lucky, because I had become... I knew about this course from a friend, who was already doing it, in the course of National Service.

And I was at something of a loose end at that time and I had to do National Service, so in order to guarantee getting on the course, I signed up as a regular, and in due

course this led to me becoming commissioned, and so I ended up by serving six years. The huge advantage of that was that I was able to go through the whole range of the course from beginners Russian, right up to interpretership standard, which I eventually completed in, I don't know, 1957, something like that, two or three years.

And so I came to Cambridge already equipped with a fluency in Russian, so translation presented no real problem.

00:08:39

JP You were just a natural?

EB Well, I mean I had, you know, a certain linguistic facility. I spoke French and German, which I'd done to A-Level, but I also benefited from an extremely rigorous training, you know, very orthodox training, very rigorous training. And, you know, with a further three-year undergraduate course behind me, you know, that part of the research equipment was there, you know, in place.

JP Which of course forms so much of the first part of Meyerhold on Theatre.

EB Exactly, yes. And there were these, this is the Volkov biography [unclear]...

JP Oh, the two volumes.

EB ...which goes up to the revolution but no further. There were plans to bring it up to date into the 30s, but it never materialised. And there was this rather dubious book - this is Yuri Yelagin *Dark genius*.

00:10:01

JP Mm. These were your first primary sources, secondary and primary sources.

EB Yes, and this was enough, it kept me going. I mean unfortunately lacking informed advice, I started out with Yelagin, which I should never have done.

[Laughter]

EB And only then went on to Volkov and only gradually did I discover just how dubious a source Yelagin was, but, anyway.

JP And that goes right up to 1939...

EB It covers the whole period, yes. But of course another reason for putting the proposal to Methuen was the existence of this [Nina Gourfinkel]. There were also a collection of Meyerhold's writings in Italian, but there was Gourfinkel; Gourfinkel, you know, has the great virtue that it collected a great deal of extremely useful material available at that time. Its shortcoming is that it's pretty haphazardly assembled. It has a fairly fragmentary commentary and some of its choices are rather arbitrary.

But, nevertheless, there it was. I mean it was really, I suppose, I would say it was there to be improved on apart from the fact that it was in French. And Geoffrey and John Cullen were aware of it and I think they didn't see any advantage in getting it translated from French, when it was possible for somebody to go back to the original, as I suggested. So there was that and of course there was *Brecht on Theatre* and that was the obvious model.

00:12:12

JP So you were then launched, effectively on both a set of translations, a Ph.D. thesis and a book project.

EB Yes.

JP Can you tell us a little bit about how you managed to orchestrate those three parallel journeys?

EB Yes, indeed, well I think I immediately saw an advantage in setting about translating the key texts, because I would inform myself better about Meyerhold by doing that; I'd established a chronology through doing that, and, you know, as I hoped, anticipated, a book would emerge. I mean I wasn't, at that time, thinking at all about a critical study of Meyerhold; it was enough to be working on *Meyerhold on Theatre*.

00:13:13

But in the event significant sections of the commentary formed parts of the thesis, so much so that, you know, I came to a point, I suppose, it would've been in... yes, 1967, early 1968, where I realised, you know, that whilst I was getting boundless encouragement from Liza, and she'd also contrived a job for me teaching Russian for scientists, I was terrible at that, terrible at it, as a teacher. Although I had the equipment, you know, I was terrible as a teacher at that time.

But it was a very useful source of income and I decided that I needed some more informed supervision than Liza could possibly give, and, I thought, I know: Raymond Williams. Raymond Williams is the Judith Wilson Chair in Drama at the university. So I approached Raymond Williams and rather reluctantly he said yes, and I soon discovered why - I mean he was the most elusive supervisor you could possibly choose.

And others including David Hare have told the same story - Raymond just didn't want to know. I mean Raymond wanted to do what Raymond was doing, very laudable in itself, but didn't want to teach and certainly didn't want to supervise. But I do remember taking a section of my thesis to him, part of which was galleys of *Meyerhold on Theatre*, the commentary from. I don't think he ever offered any useful comment on it whatsoever.

But another advantage of working in parallel was that when my visit to the Soviet Union was delayed, of which more in a minute, I had the translation to keep me going, because I had the whole of *On the Theatre* to translate, and various other things,

although there came a point where I was beginning to scrape the barrel and wondering, you know, what material I'm going to work on next, you know, I've worked on all this.

Shall I tell you what happened about getting to the Soviet Union?

00:16:14

JP Yes, I'd very much like to hear that, yes, so there's obviously a moment where you've gone through the primary sources, you've done those first translations, and you realise I've got to go, actually, to the Soviet Union and do some archival research. Is that right?

EB Yes, that's right. Sarah and I got married in September 1965 and the anticipation was, almost immediately, I would beetle off to the Soviet Union, which wasn't an exciting prospect, personally speaking, but it had to be done. So I put in this application saying I wanted to work on Meyerhold; back came the reply, from the Soviet Ministry of Culture, 'we can't accept this application, because there is no suitable supervisor'. So, I thought, where do I go from here, you know?

But, as I said, at least I had the translations to keep me going and a certain amount of material, other bits and pieces that I'd discovered by this time, so I continued through 1965, 1966, and applied again, only this time I proposed the topic of the Representation of the Hero in Soviet Civil War drama. I thought they couldn't possibly object to that and they didn't, they accepted it.

At which point the Foreign Office said we can't let you go to the Soviet Union...

00:18:10

JP Because...?

EB Because you're a security risk.

JP I see.

EB Because I'd worked in, pretty low grade, but I'd worked in Air Force Intelligence. So I appealed against this decision and I was summoned to the Air Ministry. And interviewed by this very affable Wing Commander, and, we chatted for a few minutes, he said, I don't think there's any real reason why you shouldn't go; you seem a very sensible sort of chap.

And that was that, that was the decision, so I was now cleared to go. But this had led to a further delay, and while I should've gone in September 1966, I ended up by going in December 1966. But that was all right, I mean that was good enough, and, you know, I'd got quite a lot of work behind me by that time.

00:19:05

JP And did you go straight to Leningrad?

EB I went straight to Leningrad. I went to... I enrolled in the State University and I thought it was about time I got this topic sorted out. So, I took a deep breath, went to see the Dean of the faculty, who was called Jangir Alyabasovic Karimov [?], and, I said, well, you know, I was due to work on the representation of the Civil War hero, but what I really want to do, and what I've been working on, is the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold.

He didn't turn a hair and he said, right, come back and see me next week. And the following week I went back to see him, quaking in my shoes, and, he said, yes, we're assigning you to the State Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography. We won't name a formal supervisor, but you'll be given every facility there, so, in other words, nobody had to carry this can, you know, because Meyerhold was still a somewhat dodgy topic in quite a few people's minds.

So I went to the State Theatre Institute and I was assigned to a very unassuming scholar, called Isaac Schneidermann, and Schneidermann couldn't have been more helpful. I mean he produced this compendious card index with hundreds of references in books, periodicals, newspapers, to Meyerhold, and put it at my disposal. So I was able to transcribe this and that provided the basis for work on virtually everything that had been published since the year dot.

00:21:15

JP So was there an archive in the institute?

EB No, there wasn't, but I was able to work in the public library, and also in the Academy of Science Library, and both of those had compendious holding of newspapers and periodicals. So if I wanted, you know, the Tiflis daily newspaper, I could go to the Academy of Sciences, or... anything in effect was available.

The archives were still closed at that time, meaning quite soon archive material began to be published, and in typical Russian manner was unexpurgated, exhaustively documented. So, although it was unfortunate, you know, that I couldn't work in the archives, in the end I don't think I missed very much of significance at all, because everything in due course appeared.

I mean over the years I worked on the other books, you know, and virtually everything came in, even including the KGB archives, which revealed, you know, the details of Meyerhold's arrest, interrogation, and execution.

JP And would that be one of the main differences between the 1968, I think 1969, publication date, is that right, for the first *Meyerhold on Theatre* and the 1991 version?

EB Exactly, in fact, I'd forgotten this myself to be honest, but if you look at the 1998 edition I think it's the same page number there.

00:23:11

JP I think it is.

EB But compare the last two pages there with the last two pages here.

JP Mm, so we're in An Alien Theatre 1927 to 1940, that section.

EB Yes.

JP Yes, so at this stage you had no knowledge or...

EB Nobody did. I mean there were, you know, members of the family who had some inkling, but there was no documentation.

JP Oh. So "he is believed to have been shot in a Moscow prison in February".

EB Yes, one could say no more at that time.

JP Yes, whereas, of course, in Revolution in the Theatre there's a whole section, which goes through those archival materials, from the KGB.

EB That's right.

00:24:13

JP And they were released in the early 90s, were they?

EB Yes. Yes, they were.

JP Thank you. So you're putting together the resources in Leningrad, you're in the State Library, at some stage you realised that there was also material in Moscow.

EB Yes.

JP Was that another extended period of research?

EB I was a month in Moscow; two reasons really. I mean almost everything I needed was in Leningrad. But the two main reasons for Moscow, first, was to go to the Bakhrushin Museum and to look at the photographic archives, which were absolutely accessible.

And not only were they accessible, but they, you know, were quite prepared, for nothing, to give me copies of any photographs that I had specified. Extraordinary! And in due course they came through, you know, even after I had returned to England. So that was the first reason. I also went to the Moscow Art Theatre archive, which had a small amount of stuff on the Theatre Studio period in 1905, not very much, but a certain amount. But the other very important reason for going to Moscow was to meet people, you know, and talk to them.

Meyerhold's granddaughter, Masha Valentei, was absolutely key in the whole restoration-rehabilitation story. But, you know, actors and directors who had worked

with Meyerhold were there and quite happy to talk. So, you know, that was what I did when I went to Moscow.

00:26:11

JP Just explain to me what it was like when you came across those visual resources? Had you seen some of the productions? Obviously there would be other sources that you'd drawn on, but what surprises were in the Bakhrushin for you?

EB Not so much surprises as far greater volume, because I had seen a fair bit of photographic and design material in the Lunacharsky Museum in Leningrad. But, there were whole folders, so, you know, you get a much more comprehensive view of The Government Inspector, because every scene would be documented photographically in the Bakhrushin Museum. So it was more a question of filling out gaps and confirming impressions, rather than, you know, huge surprises.

JP So at the end of that period, you come back in 1967?

EB I came back in September 1967, yes.

JP With, I think, you document elsewhere, or I heard in your keynote in Hull, crate loads of sources.

EB Yes.

JP What then happened?

00:27:33

EB What then happened was, we're at the end of 1967, you know, I had to address myself to the completion of a thesis. There's the thesis by the way.

JP Ah! Thank you.

EB This is what a thesis looked like in those days.

JP Wow. I was going to ask you what your driving research question was, so I'm delighted to see this. "The Dramatic Theory and Practices of Vsevolod Meyerhold, a dissertation submitted for the degree of Ph.D., University of Cambridge, by Edward Braun".

EB You see I had page-proofs of the photographs of the book by this time.

JP Yes. And this thesis was submitted when?

00:28:30

EB It was submitted just about the time I came to Bristol in 1969.

JP So pretty much in parallel with the publication of Meyerhold of Theatre

EB Yes, exactly.

JP I'm looking here at the Table of Contents and you've got Introduction, Chapter one, 1896 to 1905, and Chapter nine, at the bottom, 1931 to 1940. Maybe we could just talk a little bit, if that's all right, about your chronological choices, particularly in the *Meyerhold on Theatre* publication.

EB Yes, sure.

JP Because that's the fundamental organisation of architecture, isn't it?

00:29:09

EB Yes. I think I started with the ambition to produce something similar to the Willett book, which went chronologically and had a commentary, although a relatively brief commentary, to each section. And didn't have any introductory commentary, it was simply, you know, an endnote to the various pieces.

But I wanted something like that and I didn't want to do something like Gourfinkel, you know; admirable though Gourfinkel's assembly of that material was, it was pretty ramshackle. And also, I think I realised, as I began to work on the prefatory commentaries to each section, that this book could go quite some way towards doing two things.

It could introduce Meyerhold to the English speaking public through his own words, but it could also provide an introduction to his career through a fairly detailed chronological account of what he did. So that more or less dictated that chronological scheme, you know, the only exception was the section on film.

00:30:58

JP Yes, the last section.

EB Which I felt, really, you know, was sui generis, and it would be better served by being dealt with in a separate chapter. It wouldn't have... it wasn't easy to stitch it into the other bits. It would rather distract from the flow of the book, as you know, in the two subsequent books I wrote, I incorporated the film productions, the two, and his other film work into the overall narrative.

JP There is one challenge to that chronology, isn't there, a subtle one, but nevertheless there's the parallelism of the work at the Imperial Theatres and the Doctor Dapertutto period.

00:31:52

EB Yes.

JP And of course you in a sense have to tell it that way, because that was what he was doing.

EB Well, he was working, you know, he was leading a double life. He was working as, you know, a director of his Imperial Majesty and also working under this, you know, completely transparent pseudonym Dapertutto in the studios. So that seemed to me to make sense to keep those distinct, because they were distinct in his own career.

00:32:27

JP And the other pivot point, obviously, is before and after the revolution. A sort of more general question, really, about that, before we dive into some other questions: how in your own engagement with those sources, and in the translation of them, how significant was it in language terms that pivot point? Can you discern a different rhetoric, a different style, a different tone in the writing?

EB Yes. I'm not sure how clearly I did at the time. I think it's... I moved around much more to the opinion, in subsequent years, particularly in the writing of the last book, that there is a continuity. To my mind the keyword to this continuity is 'grotesque'.

From the very early years and particularly from his first encounter with Blok, you know, and *The Fairground Booth*, there's much more continuity from then, right through, and beyond the Revolution and it's something that never goes away. I think when I was working on the book I rather took the view, or accepted the view that came the revolution, came his joining the party, with productions in RSFSR theatre, number one, like *The Dawn*, and so on that everything changed. I think now it was more a question of his responding quite sincerely and committedly to the revolution, and adopting appropriate rhetoric, which you see in the writings in *Theatre Herald* from that time. But really, as early as, I think, I would say, certainly as early as Erdmann's, *The Warrant*, you know, that other side is reasserting itself to his eventual downfall I think. I think he was seen through.

Now, I mean, I don't think it's a matter of his playing the part of the revolution, because I think he, you know, sincerely espoused the revolution over the Civil War and post-Civil War period, but I do think that at bottom there was this other view of human behaviour, which expressed itself through certain key productions. I mean *The Warrant*, and, obviously, *The Government Inspector*, and others, subsequently.

JP Could we talk a little bit about translation and what the experience was like? What did you find most challenging in the process of that enormous, original source translation?

00:36:08

EB Well I suppose the first challenge was actually learning theatrical language, because I'd not come from a theatrical background, you know, as you know there was scarcely such a thing as a Drama Department at that time. So, you know, I had to inform myself about the nuts and bolts of theatre, let alone the whole vast area of Meyerhold's erudition.

But I had to, you know, learn what a forestage was, I almost had to learn what Stage Left was, you know, but there were certain specific problems, certain very tricky terms. I mean, I suppose the trickiest, also because it's very important, is the whole notion of, what in Russian is, *uslovnost*, which I eventually settled on translating as 'stylisation', but stylisation is an inadequate translation of what that term implies. I mean 'conventionality' in a sense is a better rendering of it, but then that's no satisfactory word in English.

But it's the whole notion of, you know, the manipulation of theatrical convention working against verisimilitude, all that whole world of theatricality. So that was a very tricky one to translate.

00:37:51

JP And that provides a real pivot point in the first part of the book is, as well, isn't?

EB Yes, exactly.

JP In the theatre of mood section.

EB Yes. And I think you can only... I mean I think I tried, you know, there's a very useful footnote at one point. I think I made a note of it - yes, page 43 is a footnote.

JP Yes, indeed. "With the word stylisation I do not imply the exact reproduction of the style of a certain period. To stylise a given period or phenomenon means to employ every possible means of expression in order to reveal the inner synthesis of that period, features which are to be found deeply embedded in the style of any work of art". So this is a note by Meyerhold himself.

00:38:38

EB Yes. But I think it's absolutely key. I mean he comes back to this on, if you go on to 137, where he's discussing the grotesque.

JP Yes.

EB 137, 138.

00:38:59

JP "The impossibility of embracing the totality of reality justifies the schematisation of the real, in particular, by means of stylisation".

EB Yes.

JP Yes, very helpful.

EB I mean, I think, you know, the blinding revelation as far as I was concerned was this whole notion of the grotesque, which is... the ramifications of it are endless, as you know, and not just in theatre. And I don't think this is anything I really consciously encountered before, and it corresponded to so much that I'd seen, both in the theatre, and in art, as well, in painting, and sculpture, but painting particularly. And music, I mean, you know, it's the key to Shostakovich, if you like, you know, you hear all the time in Shostakovich.

00:40:07

JP Did you feel as you went through those sources in chronological terms that there was a kind of shift in form? Clearly the opening part of *Meyerhold on Theatre* is built up from *On the Theatre* isn't it?

EB Yes.

JP And Meyerhold had time in that part of his life to write in continuous prose over some extensive time.

EB Yes.

JP It's much more fragmentary, isn't it, the latter part?

EB Yes, because, as you say, he had time to write the book at that time. And I think, also, I mean having written the book, you know, it was published in a pretty small edition, but it was well known, you know, the ideas were there. And of course you know he became progressively busier in the theatre, leaving him less time, and quite a lot of the later material consists in transcripts of public statements.

And is appropriately polemical as a result of that, although I think he is never very far from the polemical. I mean even in *On the theatre*, you know, he's still polemicizing against naturalism, particularly when he comes on to Balagan, and the whole notion of the grotesque.

JP Could you tell us a bit about the choices, sometimes probably difficult choices, you needed to make in respect to what you wanted to include, and what you felt was less vital in this first edition?

00:42:02

EB You know I was wondering about that. I think they were almost self-selecting. I don't recall sort of agonising choices. I think partly because I had, you know, it's a fairly lengthy book, I think that Methuen were fairly indulgent towards me. I can't recall any editorial confrontations, they were happy pretty well to receive what I sent them.

Okay, you know, we discussed detail, but we didn't... it wasn't a question of do we include this, or do we include that, so, truly, I don't recall that as a great issue. I was pursuing a narrative, I was looking for the development of ideas, and that led me to, you know, the choices I made.

And, if we're considering, for example, a period of biomechanics, there really wasn't all that much, so I included what there was.

00:43:27

JP Beatrice, Picon-Vallin, produced a four volume....

EB Well, Beatrice, you know, yes, I mean, which is exhaustive, and, of course, she benefitted from the publication, initially, of the two-volume edition, which is pretty hefty in itself, but all the various things: letters, rehearsal transcription, and so on that appeared since then, but even Beatrice doesn't include everything.

JP No of course not.

EB But, yes, I mean, you know, provided you have access to French, if you want an exhaustive coverage, then that's where you need to go.

JP It might interest you to know, I don't know if I've ever told you this story, about ten years ago I was in conversation with Routledge, and with Talia Rogers from Routledge, who said, you know, I think we might be wanting to look at opening up Meyerhold's sources, we think there might be a lot missing. So we brought this Michael Chekhov expert, Andrei Kirrilov, I don't know whether you've ever met him...

00:44:42

EB No.

JP ... along and he's looked. And we had this meeting set up in a conference and Andrei opened up, read all the contents of your book, and he said, well, there isn't anything else that's necessary.

EB Huh!

JP And at that moment the conversation concluded. And, of course, you know, it is about exhaustion, as you say, how exhaustive the collection is, but I think the message is clearly that every key period is represented here in the richness of the writing and the shifts of tone in the writing.

00:45:13

EB I mean obviously, if one were starting over, one would include more of the documentation of those last months. One would include the letters to Molotov, and things like that. But, that particular case, you asked me if there are sections that I attach particular significance to, and I looked through, and I think the ones that I particularly hit on... Do you want me to talk about this?

JP Yes, very much, thank you.

EB Well, firstly, the whole Balagan, The Fairground Booth essay, which is, I think, absolutely essential. And, correspondingly, the fairly short section on biomechanics, from 197 onwards, about ten pages, no more, which is... Well, of course, there are other things, but...

00:46:30

JP This is the section that has obviously the infamous $[N=A1 + A2]$.

EB Exactly, yes.

JP All of the stuff about innate capacity for reflex excitability.

EB Yes.

JP Yes, in my version it's absolutely speckled with marginalia, really, as you say very intensified set of ideas.

EB Yes.

JP And anything from the later part of the...

EB Well, I was going to say, this is what led me onto it. What I find I'm pulling out are very very detailed descriptions of productions. Now, I would add to these the early pieces from The Love for Three Oranges on the studio activities, which I think are very useful, because, in the end, they're very detailed, talking about, you know, the precise exercises that were conducted with students. But, also, I'd add to that the description of Hedda Gabler, page 65.

00:47:50

JP Stylisation at work.

EB Yes. Balaganchik, page 70, 71, I think absolutely key.

JP Again just a page but absolutely rich.

EB Then later there's the transcript of Governor Inspector rehearsals.

00:48:21

JP Yes, you dedicate a whole section to The Government Inspector, didn't you?

EB Yes.

JP I've got to ask you why, I mean I think I know the answer, but...

EB Because, firstly, I mean you have the benefit of considerable documentation, and critical responses. And, secondly, it focuses on so many ideas. Only latterly did I

discover, you know, the marvellous references to the eroticism in it, you know, he's encounter with a Freudian analysis of *The Government Inspector* in 1926.

JP Oh. Would you say that of all Meyerhold's productions there is a particular synthesis of thinking that's going on in *The Government Inspector*, which makes it that bit more remarkable?

00:49:17

EB Well, I think it has to do with the centrality of *The Government Inspector* in Russian theatre. You know of all the classics it's probably the one that stands out, you know, the one that directors measure themselves against, not only in Russia, but measure themselves against, again and again.

And I think the whole notion of the mask, and deception, and dualism, I think, makes it particularly appropriate, you know, and you've got this whole sequence of dual characters, beginning with *Balaganchik*, running the whole way through Meyerhold's work. And this to me is, you know, the absolute central one in that chain, preceded by Erdmann, you know, *The Warrant*.

JP You mentioned a number of times Meyerhold's erudition being a challenge for you as a translator. It's also perhaps a challenge for the reader, as well, isn't, when you...? I was reading some of the later materials here. In fact that 1936 speech and the range of references which he just has to hand.

00:50:49

EB I know.

JP The depth of reading and the depth of understanding of contemporary theatre is quite extraordinary, isn't?

EB Yes.

JP Is that a particularly Russian sensibility?

EB Well, you ask that question, I was wondering about it. I think that he was absolutely *sui generis*, you know, I mean... I can never resist polemicizing against Stanislavsky, but Stanislavsky was a dullard by comparison, you know, who got it wrong very often in the kind of productions that they put on. They're so galumphing and I think limited in their resonance.

But, quite apart from that, it occurs to me that it has quite a lot to do with the interaction of the arts in Russia. You know there's much more interchange, I think, probably still is, but certainly was between theatre, literature, music, painting, poetry, you know. I mean, again, as I say, Meyerhold, obviously, was exceptional, but he was very close to Pasternak, to Shostakovich, to Eisenstein...

00:52:24

JP Mayakovsky.

EB Mayakovsky, and so on, and so on, and I think that kind of, and this was very true of the pre-revolutionary period, you know, the whole period of the World of Art, one can add ballet to this, it encouraged a very wide range of reference, both in how he approached productions and how he wrote.

JP And also for me, interestingly, in the training of actors, as well, if you look at some of those curricula, not just for Meyerhold, in fact for people like Michael Chekhov, and even someone like Komisarjevsky, they have this common belief that there's a roundedness that's necessary in training, which includes literary study, it includes poetry, it includes fine art; really fascinating.

00:53:33

EB But I think there's no doubt that this reached far beyond the capacity of the average spectator, if there is such a thing.

JP Yes.

EB Or the average reader, you know, and it certainly had me, you know, reaching for works of reference, or thinking, you know, I can't continue here without a bit of work on, quite a bit of work, Molière, you know, come on, find out who Il Perugino was, and so on, because you can't just gloss over it. If there is a particular point being made, you know, you need to grasp that point by tracing references back to the source.

00:54:23

JP Yes indeed and that's one of the real joys of this work, I think, you do as a reader feel supported in the scholarly work that's around it, you know, and the journeys that you will be taken off on in your own interest, because it's so well foot-noted and so well constructed.

EB Yes.

JP Can we say a little bit about post 1969, and indeed the 1991 version, and any stories, or any experiences you had of people having read this, and being affected by the work? What was your sense? It's sometimes difficult as a writer to get any sense of what the impact is of the work that we're doing.

00:55:14

EB Very difficult I think. Your work appears in print, and you think, God, isn't it bigger than that?

[Laughter]

EB And you go around counting the number of copies on bookshelves and in bookshops.

JP It strikes that if you think of that period, before this work came out, I'm thinking sort of 30s, 40s, 50s, there's a very well-known story of Joan Littlewood, going to the Manchester Central Library, opening up Leon Moussinac's, *New Movement in the Theatre*, seeing these productions and, actually, looking at the pictures, in a sense. And then reconstructing a set of trainings, which she borrows from the writings of Stanislavski, borrows the images of Meyerhold, borrowing from Brecht, as well, and constructing a whole new approach. And it's books like that which are kind of fundamental transmission mechanisms, aren't they?

00:56:22

EB Yes.

JP And, I would say, obviously, that Meyerhold on Theatre is absolutely the same, it's trying, to my mind, to get to that story, which I know is very complex, but...

EB Yes. I think it's very difficult to distinguish between influence and impact and absorption. I remember reading a very salutary article by Lars Kleberg on this subject, you know, criticising this mania for tracing influences. I think he was right, you know, but, okay, there may be instances where documentation indicates this.

JP We know that for the pictures of Nikolai Kustov for instance, in the mid-30s.

00:57:12

EB That's right, yes, and I remember seeing a production by Prospect Productions, by Toby Robertson, of *The Government Inspector*, and he simply lifted the Meyerhold invention, of the mayor's wife's dream, from photographs of Meyerhold's production. Now, you know, do you call that influence or what?

JP Yes or citation perhaps.

[Laughter]

JP It's all been extraordinarily helpful, thank you. I think I've been through all the questions that I wanted to raise with you. Anything that you had thought through in terms of the questions I asked in advance?

00:58:12

EB Let me just have a look. Oh, I know, just one tiny thing. You asked me this question of translation and terminology. I went up to Preston last summer, when Terence was hosting Gennady Bodganov, in his week of biomechanics workshops there, and the question of *raccours* came up and *raccoursi*

JP Yes.

EB Well, people are still scratching their heads over how that translates and there was Gennadi, you know, teaching the students, and telling them to observe the racours. And we, in the end, just decided that probably the closest you'll get is 'juxtaposition'.

JP Really?

EB One figure against another. Now, I mean that's yet another... I remember, you know, encountering it for the first time that term, and tracing it back to French, which is, I think, 'trajectory' is one way of translating.

00:59:33

JP Foreshortening.

EB Foreshortening, yes.

JP Yes indeed and of course the really interesting thing there for me is when that terminology is being embodied by people, rather than, you know, taken through in academic discourse. There's a sense that there's a different kind of knowledge with that word. People are understanding it in different ways.

EB Yes sure.

JP When you ask those actors what racours is, or might be, they will perhaps only be able to articulate it by saying, well, when we did that here, and here, that's what it was.

EB Yes. And he was very open-minded about it, you know, I mean speaking a certain amount of English, and French, but... No, I thought it was very interesting, you know, the debate goes on, so to speak.

JP I've got one final question for you, if you don't mind, and that's just a sense of whether you think there's any additional work to be done?

01:00:37

EB Yes, you asked me this at Hull and I was sort of dumbstruck at the time, but I've had more time to think about it now - one thing... well, a number of things strike me. Firstly, just to go back to what we've just been talking about, I think there is work to be done on this whole question of impact, or how ideas, concepts, disseminate themselves and how they can be observed. Not necessarily documented, but observed.

And if you think of a line through Lyubimov, and Dodin at the Maly, and Ariane Mnouchkine, and Brook, and, you know, Peter Sellars, or whoever, Declan Donnellan, and just juxtaposing approaches, and seeing what, if they have, they have to say about it, and seeing what sort of continuity you can discern through that.

I mean I think that's constructive and it's essentially non-fanciful, you know, it's looking to see what's there and seeing what the affinities, similarities are.

01:02:02

JP And kind of working across traditions in a way or constructing new traditions.

EB Yes. I mean, you know, there are obvious parallels to be found between Brook's Dream and Meyerhold's Forest, say. Now, that's not to say that Brook looked at Meyerhold's Forest, which he probably did, and thought, I know, I'll use acrobatics.

JP [Laughs] yes.

EB But it is to say that if you juxtapose those and see where the resemblances are, where the divergences are, you know, is Brook's dream a different category, because, essentially, what he is devising is a vocabulary of magic in the Dream, which is not what Meyerhold is doing; Meyerhold is devising a vocabulary of theatricality I think, you know, with the two strolling players. So that sort of comparison is worth pursuing. I think given the wealth of material that has appeared on Meyerhold's rehearsals, particularly, you know, in these two volumes [for instance], then there's something to be done using that kind of material.

JP So these are detailed stenographic records of...

01:03:37

EB They're detailed stenographic records of rehearsals. And, like those passages I mentioned in Meyerhold on Theatre, I think the essence would be to see how the ideas, the concepts translated into practice on stage, going right down to fine detail.

JP I absolutely agree with you on that.

EB And, you know, the extent, also, tracking the extent to which biomechanics remains a consistent informer of what he was doing as a director.

JP Yes before and after it was named biomechanics in fact.

EB Sure.

01:04:40

JP Yes, I would agree with that. One of the things that I really enjoyed about doing the Routledge practitioner's book was the insistence in the template, I know some have criticised, that you move from biography, to theoretical ideas, to production and then, finally, to practical exercises.

And of course, by the time you've been through that process, in a short, historical summary book, those associations begin to become much more concretised in thinking. How the stick-work, for instance, inculcates a sense of ensemble, that you then see, you know, visible in Government Inspector.

EB Yes and I think the detail is there to be found and there to be isolated. I think Paul Schmidt's book is okay, but, you know, it was hampered, as we all were at that time by what was available, and I think there is a modern counterpart for that to be done.

The other thing that occurred to me is the whole question of architectonics, of stage space, and how that evolved over the years, you know, how Meyerhold manipulated stage space, and ended up, you know, with extraordinary radical solutions. I mean like *I want a child*, for example, which I know never happened. But, nevertheless, it became fairly advanced in its preparation. But, again, you can take that right back to 1906, you know, initially the work on Symbolist theatre, and then on Balaganchik, and so on.

01:06:50

JP Yes, indeed, I was reminded on the train down, reading the last section of the book, about how constrained he was by the poor theatre spaces that he was working in, and the vision he had for that new theatre, which ultimately was, you know, actually, sanitised in many ways, and reduced down to a concert hall, rather than the extraordinary vision that was there. So it's difficult to fully get a sense of how innovative he might have been, had he had some of those resources behind him.

EB Well I think the theatre has only really caught up with that subsequently. I mean he owned a debt to Georg Fuchs, and Appia, and others, obviously, but those ideas were never fully realised; and he came close to realising them.

JP It just remains for me to thank you deeply, Ted, for all of your fascinating thoughts and reminiscences around the production of *Meyerhold on Theatre*, and I hope to do justice to what you have to say in the introduction.

EB I'm sure you will and it's been a great pleasure, because you brought all sorts of thoughts and experiences flooding back to me. Thanks a lot.

JP Thank you.